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ABSTRACT

Jessica and Elizabeth are two female characters, twins, featured throughout Francine Pascal's Sweet Valley series, the Bantam Publishers popular series for girls from elementary school through junior high, high school, university, and well into adulthood. This paper notes that these books are a part of the same formula that are used for romance novels written for adults (Harvey, 1981; Lane, 1981; Watson, 1981), and as part of a content analysis of approximately 22 fictional romance chapter books written for elementary students, the paper seeks to examine the commonalities and differences among female characters as role models for young girls within a context of Jungian and feminist theory. Discussion related to protagonists' growth, internal versus external locus of control exhibited by the protagonist, strong gender lines, role models of stereotypic "girl-ish" and negative behavior, and the promotion of faux-maturity themes are examined in this paper. Appendixes include a table of results of female protagonists in 22 Sweet Valley Kids novels according to internal or external locus of control, and examples of unchecked negative behavior derived from field notes from the Sweet Valley Kids series. (Contains 30 references.) (Author/AEF)

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Meet Jessica and Elizabeth from Sweet Valley: Who are the female role models in popular romance novels for children?

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Meet Jessica and Elizabeth from Sweet Valley:
Who are the female role models in popular romance novels for children?

Meet two popular females, Jessica and Elizabeth, who are featured throughout Francine Pascal's Sweet Valley series. Jessica and Elizabeth Wakefield are twins in Bantam Publishers popular series for girls from elementary school through junior high, high school, university, and well into adulthood as they travel to romantic places like Paris and Rome. When one reads the title of this proposal referring to popular *romance* novels for children, perhaps a creeping feeling of discrepancy enters the mind. Children reading *romance* novels? In actuality, these books are a part of the same formula that are used for romance novels written for adults (Harvey, 1981; Lane, 1981;Watson, 1981). As part of a content analysis of approximately 22 fictional romance chapter books written for elementary students, this paper seeks to examine the commonalities and differences among female characters as role models for young girls within a context of Jungian and feminist theory. Discussion related to protagonists' growth, internal versus external locus of control exhibited by the protagonist, strong gender lines, role models of stereotypic "girl-ish" and negative behavior, and the promotion of faux-maturity themes will be examined in this paper.

Perspectives and Conceptual Framework

Because of the many research studies which cite internal locus of control as the determining factor in school achievement (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld, & York, 1966; Harshway, 1990; Wolf & Chandler, 1980), retention and completion rates (Stone, 1992), adjustment to college (Mooney, 1991) and preventative healthcare behaviors (Reeh & Reilly, 1995), I developed a coding scheme using locus of control as the conceptual framework. In a larger content analysis, 148 fictional Newbery protagonists were categorized into eight discrete categories. The following categories collapse into internal (**a-d**) and external (**e-h**) locus of control. Protagonists solved the conflict by:

a. creative reasoning or intellect,
b. conflict ceases to be perceived as a problem,
c. physical means or tools,
d. cooperative efforts or compromise,
e. unrequested intervention of same sex character/s,
f. unrequested intervention of opposite sex character/s,
g. unrequested intervention of both sex characters, or
h. some supernatural or natural occurrence.

While each category held aspects, which have provided fodder for further study, researching female characters in books such as Sweet Valley series is intriguing for several different reasons. These series are thought to be indicative of popular culture, and are quite representative of books that invite or target young girls. The Sweet Valley series are books that are in noticeably high demand at public libraries and are highly marketed with special displays in bookstores (Darland, 1981; Huntwork, 1990). In analyzing the characters within these chapter novels aimed specifically at young girls, I applied two

theories of literary criticism. One of the conceptual frameworks applied in this paper is Jungian theory (1959), which highlights archetypes as a kind of template or pattern. Just as literary criticism with a Jungian slant has been devoted to detecting archetypal characters, such as the Divine Child, The Earth Mother, and The Enchanted Prince in myths, legends, and fairy tales (Chesebro, 1990; Lasser, 1979), Jungian theory assisted in the analysis of these female characters. One possible archetype or template that is cast over female characters might be the sinister witch or offensive person who needs either redemption or needs conquering. A second archetype might be the spunky trickster who devises a way to intervene making things happen as a conflict resolution. Third, the innocent maiden is another archetype who by sheer association or companionship brings good fortune and resolution. And, of course, the archetype of Mother who nurtures, scolds, and sacrifices to assist (Rowland, 1999). Certainly, as young readers process these influential and highly available books, what is the archetype they will find in terms of female characters?

In addition to archetypal criticism, feminist theory was another conceptual framework that was employed as a means of interpreting the characteristics of these female characters (Gilligan, 1982; Polster, 1992; Stearney, 1994; Vandergrift, 1993, 1996). Miriam Polster argued that alternative views of what constitutes a hero should be considered rather than the 'male-skewed images which contain physical strength and aggressive behavior (Crew, 1996). Rather than traditional heroic acts which call the hero away from family and the familiar to the unknown, women's heroism (Polster, 1992), often goes undetected because it is "rooted in the particular circumstances and values of women's lives, where connection and relationship may not be quickly stated in adversarial terms "(p. 18). Will the male concept of heroism dominate female characters in books aimed specifically for girls or will a less traditional, more androgynous and relational view of the nurturing hero prevail?

C. Methods

Using content analysis and literary criticism as the general techniques, I explored the commonalities and differences among the female characters, particularly the protagonists (and coincidentally twins), Jessica and Elizabeth. Following Glesne and Peshkin's (1992) recommendations for analyzing narrative data, a progressive process of reading and sorting for patterns was used to analyze these female characters. These patterns were then synthesized into commonalities or differing themes with direct quotations from each of the books kept alongside as supporting evidence. A second reader was employed, and read the set of randomly chosen series books early so that the findings may be corroborated.

Secondly, we will code all the books based on the internal /external locus of control framework below so that any patterns related to conflict resolution may be established as well. These categories collapse into internal (**a-d**) and external (**e-h**) locus of control. Protagonists solved the conflict by:

a. creative reasoning or intellect,
b. conflict ceases to be perceived as a problem,
c. physical means or tools,
d. cooperative efforts or compromise,
e. unrequested intervention of same sex character/s,

f. unrequested intervention of opposite sex character/s,
g. unrequested intervention of both sex characters, or
h. some supernatural or natural occurrence.

By using this objective coding scheme, one can detect whether the protagonists used their own means or were rescued by some external source.

Sweet Valley Kids series as a source of data

While the population of books used for this study is not award-winning material nor is it of high literary quality, these series are extremely popular with young girls from second grade through junior high. These books are actually quite popular even beyond junior high or middle school as the twins continue in Francine Pascal's series, Sweet Valley High, Sweet Valley Senior Year, and Sweet Valley University. Francine Pascal's books are available and read worldwide at every level with postings on Amazon.com from young girls in Japan and with many of the series books translated in Spanish. There are 956 titles available that were either written or created with Francine Pascal at present. She does employ as many as four authors to keep the series books flowing for her anxious readers. At present, there are at least six different and sophisticated websites maintained by loyal readers (young girls) with Sweet Valley as the focus (see //svcorner.freeservers.com/index.html or //www.expage.com/sweetvalley).

Using this highly accessible and highly marketed population of books allowed analysis of some of the most influential children's literature today with a fairly current range of publication dates (1984 to present). This study initially examined both the Sweet Valley elementary series and the Sweet Valley junior high series. However, the wealth of data was so rich that for the purposes of this reporting, I will mainly focus on the Sweet Valley Kids series.

For the purposes of this content analysis, the first set of books of the series, Sweet Valley Kids plus an additional 16 available chapter books randomly chosen using the random tables chart were read and analyzed. Barnes and Noble report 106 books in the Sweet Valley Kids series while Amazon books reports 94 books in this series aimed at elementary students. These books provide an early profile of the female characters in these influential books. In total, 22 books were analyzed using literary and feminist criticism, examining characterization and character development, and exploring a new, interesting idea called faux maturity.

Who are Jessica and Elizabeth?: Results of the analyses

Who is she? The most striking commonality among female characters in the Sweet Valley series is the presence of both the "spunky trickster" who devises a way to intervene to make things happen as well as the "innocent maiden" who often by sheer association or companionship brings good fortune and resolution. Jessica is consistently portrayed as the spunky trickster. Jessica Wakefield is the "party twin" (as written by a teen online). In the elementary series, both twins are described in the first chapter of each book as being blonde, having blue green eyes, a dimple in each of their left cheeks, and being "best friends." Looking forward into the junior high and high school series, readers find both twins portrayed as smart, popular and gorgeous. Jessica is the twin who as a youngster judges others on appearances and is ultimately more concerned about her and

her friends' exterior trappings. She is co-captain of the cheerleading squad by the time she reaches middle school and who has many boyfriends.

On the other hand, Elizabeth Wakefield is portrayed as the studious twin who genuinely cares about school. She is popular, but unlike Jessica, she finds her way around school as the newspaper editor by the time she is in junior high and high school. Elizabeth dresses conservatively and plans for the future. Throughout the elementary series, Elizabeth is the constant nagging, boring voice of reason and of good conscience. Consistent with the archetype of "innocent maiden," Elizabeth seems to bring about good things just by being around her which can be very annoying to the scheming Jessica. Contrary to strict archetypal criticism, Elizabeth's character does not always hold to the innocent maiden archetype. Elizabeth often reprimands, complains, corrects, and then often succumbs to misbehavior because she doesn't want to feel left out.

In an interview with the creator (at http:www.randomhouse.com/sweetvalley/), Francine Pascal responds to the query of how did you come up with the idea of Jessica and Elizabeth Wakefield. She responds: "I always had a fascination with twins. The trick is to think of Elizabeth and Jessica as the good and bad sides of one person." To even the most casual reader, one immediately sees the clear dichotomy between these two identical twins that cannot be told apart, so must wear bracelets with their names engraved. The Sweet Valley High series were published between 1984 and continuing through to 2001 with subseries publication dates of 2002 for the Fearless series or of 1997 for the Super Thrillers series. Next, the Sweet Valley Twins series aimed at 8-12 year olds began being published in 1987. There are 27 books in the newest series written by Jamie Suzanne, Sweet Valley Junior High, aimed at late elementary and middle school girls. The publishing dates start in 1999 and run through the current year. Interestingly, Sweet Valley University series began in 1993; however, most of the publishing dates range from 1998-2000. Practically concurrently, the Sweet Valley Kids series began publication in 1989 and run through 1998. They are written by author Molly Mia Stewart, aimed at 6-9 year olds, created by Francine Pascal, and appear to follow the same formulaic story lines of romance novels aimed for older readers. The marketing of these series from truly beginning readers through adulthood is unique and remarkable, to say the least.

The Sweet Valley Kids series, focused upon in this paper, holds the rudimentary outline of the same characters, particularly Jessica and Elizabeth, that we find in the university and beyond series. While the characters increase in age, one notable characteristic is the inertia with which they remain the same. The following chart summarizes the dichotomy that grows throughout the elementary series, and subsequently remains constant in the series aimed toward older readers. In Freudian terms, one might consider Jessica as the representation of id and Elizabeth as the representation of the superego; however, no balanced portrayal of the ego is evident within the Sweet Valley kids series. Francine Pascal's comments about how she created these characters comes to mind in reviewing these stark differences between the main characters of Elizabeth and Jessica.

ELIZABETH	JESSICA
Favorite color is green	favorite color is pink
Plays with boys (pirates, space, explorers)	plays hopscotch and dolls with girls
Plays in soccer league with boys	doesn't like sports or getting dirty
Likes school and homework	hates homework
Neat	messy
Likes to play outside	likes to play inside (dollhouse)
Studious	best part about school is talking and passing notes
Quiet	noisy
Follows the rules; the conscience	breaks the rules; the rebel
Attentive in class	talks to friends in class
Always nice to everybody, even boys	like to play practical jokes
Goody-goody	never worries about hurting feelings
Favorite thing to do is read	never wanted to read
Tomboy	girlie
Likes writing	best jump-roper at recess;plays piano
Very trustworthy	sneaky; wants to cheat
Wants to be astronaut or writer	actress, dancer, or princess wannabe

Analyzing this chart of dichotomous characteristics reminds us of the Jungian roles that Sweet Valley's twins play in these chaptered novels for first or second graders. Elizabeth is portrayed as the innocent maiden, while Jessica is portrayed as the trickster. Feminist theorists would no doubt agree that these archetypes of trickster and of innocent maiden denigrate women's status (Enciso, 1998). By perpetuating the false and artificial stereotypes of bad girls and innocent angels, rather than the reality of strong females solving problems neither without conniving and scheming nor without being put on a pedestal. No doubt, positive role models for girls solve problems separate from those traditional male patterns of heroism, through their own intellect or creative spirit or through cooperative efforts.

Within the comfortable relationship of family, sisters, or twins, both of these females provide role models for young girls in dubious fashion. That is, if one thinks in terms of being a positive role model as navigating the trivialized problems of second grade while maintaining popularity, alienating those who are different by teasing, while maintaining at least one best friend. Both Jessica and Elizabeth, because they are extreme stereotypes of each other provide warped perceptions of the power that girls can possess to readers as young as second grade (Ricker-Wilson, 1999). And, thanks to the prolific writing team headed by Francine Pascal and the successful marketing strategies of their publisher, young girls can begin with the pabulum of Sweet Valley Kids, graduate to Sweet Valley Jr. High to perpetuate the same stereotypes of how to trivialize prepubescent problems in artificial ways. Then, they can go on to read Sweet Valley High and Sweet Valley University as a precursor to adult romance novels (Fong, 1990; Litton, 1996).

Characterization and the Twins of Sweet Valley

All novels are comprised of main characters who solve problems and who show some kind of character development. Often, in adult and children's novels, main characters are shown solving problems in ways that allow them to grow and learn and make positive strides. Generally only in novels written for adults, are main characters shown descending to their own faults or showing no personal growth at all. The vast majority of books reviewed hold Elizabeth and Jessica as the protagonists. Children's books are often faulted for being overly didactic, but that would not be the case with Sweet Valley Kids. Out of the 22 Sweet Valley Kids books read and analyzed, only one showed the protagonist as growing at all: #34 The Best Thanksgiving Ever. In this book, Jessica is adamant about not wanting to help serve Thanksgiving dinner at the homeless shelter. Only after realizing that one of her friends has been living temporarily at the shelter, does Jessica understand the importance of helping others and being thankful for what she has.

Otherwise, the books trivialize real problems like divorce or bedwetting or even issues of popularity by focusing on stereotypic characters with flat qualities. Whether the characters are the protagonists or supporting characters, they never grow personally. By adhering to the stereotypes of canned characters: the nerdy boy, the cry baby girl, the crabby teacher, or the tattletale, young female readers never get the full benefit of reading which is to vicariously experience real ways of solving problems. In #63 Lila's Christmas Angel, Lila's parents are seeking a divorce which is certainly a realistic life problem that children face. Rather than facing this problem in a straightforward and compassionate tone, the author and creator chose to have an angel come to Lila to rescue her from her problem of telling her friends about the impending divorce. No lessons, no themes, no morals to be had from this tale, only a supernatural being who steps in to give Lila comfort.

As one examines the almost exclusively female protagonists of the Sweet Valley Kids series, one notices that these characters are stagnant and do not grow emotionally. These are protagonists in the elementary series that were created at about the same time frame as the protagonists they will become as teenagers or young adults, and therefore the writers have chosen for them to remain static in order to remain true to their dichotomous characteristics. By avoiding the complexity of growth, beginning readers take in a steady diet of reading, which is void of even didactic lessons. Both researchers noted the surprising lack of themes, such as goodness or honesty winning out, inherent in quality books. In most of the books, Jessica's bad girl activities do not result in punishment, in natural consequences, or in a lesson learned; nor do Elizabeth's good intentions if not good actions. Therefore, children reading these books do not experience the lessons or consequences of real life, even though the books are categorized as realistic fiction.

Were Jessica and Elizabeth's characters assigned internal or external locus of control?

As we analyzed these books, determining the protagonist was very difficult. By definition, the protagonist or the main character is the one character in the book that changes the most, and in children's novels, it is the one character that grows the most. This definition failed, however, in most instances, because neither Jessica nor Elizabeth

show much character growth. A second definition for determining the protagonist is through whose eyes is the story told; therefore, when a book was written in first person that defines the protagonist. In previous studies, dual protagonists had been delimited, but in this case, the researcher allowed Jessica and Elizabeth as dual protagonists without being omitted.

Out of the 22 books coded, the books were evenly distributed across internal and external with 11 coded as each. Appendix A contains a table showing the breakdown of the coding. Looking at the larger framework of internal and external, the two readers coded with a 95.45% interrater reliability. When looking at each individual cell, the interrater reliability was not as high; I think because dual protagonists acting in cooperation to solve could have been coded as using compromise or cooperation between themselves, but I did not anticipate that to make adjustments for the second reader. The reliability across all eight categories was .75.

Appendix A shows, within the internal cells, that the female protagonists are portrayed as clever, if not conniving, in four of the books. Only one book was coded as the adjustment factor, which was a heavily coded cell in Newbery realistic fiction, but part of that may be reflected by the portrayal of our protagonists as stagnant characters who never grow or change. Surprisingly, there were two books coded as having a physical solution to the conflict, one is a karate book where the girl bops the boys and gains respect and the second one is a scene where the twins throw water on another girl to expose her as a witch. The last cell in the internal held four books coded as using compromise or cooperation; which is not too surprising given the female camaraderie one might expect.

The collapsed cells of the external locus of control categories revealed three same sex intervention with girl friends helping girl friends without being requested to do so. Males intervened in two additional books to resolve the conflict, but they were not peers, but a dad and an older brother (authority figures). The most loaded category was the one where conflict is resolved through some supernatural or natural occurrence with six books coded. This particular category also held 100% interrater reliability for the researchers. Upon reflection, one can see that many of these endings are very contrived. For example, a hurt dog appears to prove a veterinarian's true identity, an angel intervenes to help Lila through her parents divorce, a power shortage and the realization "that it was all a dream" explains mummies chasing second graders through a museum.

All in all, the internal and external examination is somewhat interesting, but it does not really tell the whole story of why educators and parents might use caution in recommending these books. Young readers may find themselves introduced to books they develop an appetite for. Series books in general are encouraged at this age level to boost students' fluency because they are meant to be read extensively, and devoured like innocuous snack items.

Faux-maturity factors in Sweet Valley Kids

As we read and coded these books aimed toward first and second grade beginning readers, we were struck by the oddity of what I termed faux-maturity sprinkled throughout each book. Some books, however, were laden with this notion of being "grown-up" in spite of the lack of adult maturity. Faux-maturity is characterized by unrealistic behavior on the part of children and/or unreal expectations of children or adults as to what it means to possess maturity. This notion of simulating adult behavior in

a game-like, pretend way is not rooted in reality nor is it an accurate portrayal of children in terms of developmental stages.

One book, # 25 Left-Out Elizabeth, finds theWakefield and Wilkins families taking a ski trip together. Todd Wilkins, a good guy who plays soccer with Elizabeth, Elizabeth, Jessica, and their older brother, Steven, all go skiing together. Even though Todd and Elizabeth were supposed to be best friends, the boys ignore the girls who like the bunny slopes and who are entering a snow sculpture contest. Todd and Steven meet a new boy on the slope who is a fast expert skier who wins their hearts. The girls are sad and heartbroken: "If I hear one more word about Mark, I'll just scream (p. 36)." Furthermore, the fantasy of maturity lies in the fact that after breakfast their parents offer advice to stay with the girls on the beginner slopes and don't see the second graders who are on their own to ski all day until dinner time: "So how do you like skiing?' Mrs. Wakefield asked that evening at dinner. (p. 34). The parents do conveniently show up at the hospital the next day when Steven sprains his knee after disobeying and skiing on the intermediate slopes.

In # 51 Lois and the Sleepover, the main problem is that Lois's mother won't let her come spend the night with Jessica and Elizabeth. They already think Lois is a baby, and worse, a crybaby; however, in this book, they try to intervene to make things better. Molly Mia Stewart intersperses these quotes throughout the book to remind our young readers of how tiresome parents are: "I'd like to (go to the movie), but I can't." Lois said. Why not? The movie is rated G."

" I know," Lois said. "I'm going to see it with my mom this weekend. She wants us to go together."

… "You'll have more fun with us," Jessica said,

"I know," Lois agreed. "But Mom says it's important for us to spend time alone together. She'd never let me go with you (p. 10)."

Later, Jessica adds to the "grownup" discussion of these second graders: " My parents love Elizabeth and me," Jessica blurted out. "But they still let us do stuff (p.11)."

The griping continues on page 15: "Lois nodded. "You guys are lucky, she whispered. " I wish I didn't have to do everything my mother does."

Might this researcher add a reminder that we are talking about second graders, children whose chronological age spans six to seven years old. The epitome of faux-maturity hits the reader when a friend Amy says, " Let me get this straight. You watched a video with your mom last night, you're going out to dinner with her this evening, and you're going to the movies together this weekend"

…"Only babies spend that much time with their mothers," Jessica muttered (p.22)."

As the plot progresses, Lois sneaks out of her house to attend the sleepover because she is mad at her "overprotective" mom. Jessica lies to her own mother to cover up for Lois's disappearance. Rather than experiencing negative consequences of these lies, all ends well when Lois tells Jessica and Elizabeth's mom who calls the little girl's worried mother. This last quote punctuates the message that the book sends to our little girls reading this book: " Wow," Jessica said. She was impressed that Lois had been brave enough to do that (sneak out of her house) (p. 56)."

Several of the subseries within the Sweet Valley Kids series, such as the Hair Raiser series or the Super Snooper Series prepare these youngsters to go on to read scary romance novels or mysterious romance novels. In The Hair Raiser Super Special entitled,

A Curse on Elizabeth, a class of second graders takes a field trip to the Los Angeles History Museum to see the King Ramses mummy. Even though the class stays in partners or buddies, the field trip is essentially not chaperoned. Incredible and fantastic things happen throughout this "hair raiser": lights go completely out, thunder breaks, Andy is missing and mummy may have gotten him, a stuffed woolly mammoth seems to come to life to chase them, oxygen is depleted and they cannot breath, alarms go off, all the cobras escape their cages and are after them, green goo leaks from the mummy, the King Ramses mummy advances to get Elizabeth. This sense of faux-maturity is assumed by the author to be exhilarating to young second graders, likely because the denouement of the plot occurs when everyone realizes that a storm knocked out the lights as well as Elizabeth and it was all really a dream.

Likewise, in Super Snooper #6, The Case of the Million Dollar Diamonds, the second graders have formed a Super Snoopers Club to solve mysteries. Second graders stand alone in line to see Santa, while the parents shop. Alarms go off in the mall because there has been a jewelry theft. Intuitively Jessica and Elizabeth are on the trail of the real criminals while their parents and the police are clueless. Lila finds one of the stolen diamonds, but Jessica says not to tell any grownups about this. " If we do, they'll take over the case. But if we find the rest of the diamonds ourselves, then we'll be heroes (p. 35)" Jessica: Just one problem, we can't solve any mystery with Dad around." So they beg their father, " We need a bit of time to shop alone. (p. 36)"

Additional examples of faux maturity are found in #29 Andy and the Alien as well as #56 Jessica Plays Cupid. In Andy and the Alien, another field trip for second graders occurs. This time the unaccompanied kids are off on their own exploring Secca Lake for the better part of the day. In Jessica Plays Cupid, concepts of faux-maturity are also seen in the new babysitter hired by the Wakefields. Molly, the babysitter, is in seventh grade, but her boyfriend is a freshman in high school. "Molly and Jack broke up because she told him about a party yesterday and he didn't even know what she was talking about. He never listens to me. Men are terrible listeners! (p. 47)"
Children reading this series are acculturated to this gendered language starting as young as second grade. I know that these generalizations about boys and men, if not exact statements, are found in the junior high series as well as the high school series. Chapter 11 of this book is called "Smooches" and includes a dramatic kissing scene between Molly and Jack: Jack rushed up to us. "Molly, I'm so—"
"Shh." Molly put a finger over Jack's lips. She stepped very, very close to him. Jack and Molly kissed. On the lips.
"Eww," Elizabeth said.
I covered my eyes. "Gross!"
Molly and Jack kept kissing…Molly laughed. "Sorry."

In book #3, Jessica and Elizabeth spy their substitute teacher getting into a police car in The Twins' Mystery Teacher. Rather than seeking advice or help from adults, the twins decide to keep this finding a secret so as not to upset their parents. The mystery teacher is treated throughout the book as the "attractive bad boy." Note the following: "Shh! Our parents might hear you! (p.38) " They would get upset," "If my mom finds out our teacher is a criminal, she'll be really angry!"

As the character of conscience within the series, part of Elizabeth wanted to tell her mother, "but part of her agreed with Jessica. Mrs. Wakefield would only start to worry if she knew about Mr. Marshall. Elizabeth didn't want that to happen. (p. 39)"
For this researcher, the most alarming part comes when Jessica realizes that "she wasn't scared, but she was excited… They had never had such an exciting substitute! (p. 42)."
…"Jessica nodded. She was so excited, she couldn't stop smiling.(p. 44)"
Later when Mr. Marshall calls on Jessica, Jessica imagines she is in trouble for passing warning notes about Mr. Marshall, but he actually wants help passing out art supplies: "That was a close call!" she squeaked (p. 45)…Mr. Marshall smiled and sat down again. This time nothing bad happened. But what would he do next? (p. 46)"

Faux-maturity or this idea of simulating adulthood and bringing adult concerns and language into the minds of second grade protagonists gives young readers false impressions of what complexities adulthood holds without offering the enrichment of vicarious growth for the protagonists. It makes reaching maturity seem more like playing a game or engaging in a drama than its everyday reality.

Role models of "unchecked" negative behavior

In Alison Lurie's thought provoking book, Don't Tell the Grownups: Subversive Children's Literature, the premise is set forward that many adults never stop to seriously consider any book written for children and many contain wonderfully subversive ideas about the world. After all, they are "just" children's books. After reviewing this sample of 22 Sweet Valley Kids books, I can only imagine parents and teachers coming to the clear conclusion that they are "just kids' books" so what can the harm really be? However, I found the children in Sweet Valley not to be portrayed as subversive, but just portrayed as obnoxiously, plain and simple: mean.

Given my extensive reading of children's literature throughout my career and upon examination of the Sweet Valley Kids books, I was totally caught off guard by the repeating pattern of "unchecked" negative behavior by the main characters. Jessica and her friends lead the group, but it is couched in the idea that they love to play tricks and jokes, just like normal kids. Elizabeth always protests and reminds everyone of his or her transgressions. Often, Elizabeth's presence helps a situation; however, Elizabeth rarely models the courage to stand up to her sister or her peers.

As I was reading and taking field notes on these books, I kept coming back to the antithesis of Alison Lurie's title, saying to myself: " Please do tell the grownups!" Appendix B provides some examples of characters, most often the protagonists, modeling inappropriate behavior without redress. Don't misunderstand this researcher's complaint; all books have an antagonist and embrace conflict or a story would not exist. Further, as realistic fiction, books hold both good and bad behavior. However, good children's literature authors find ways to show the consequences of bad behavior, find good characters to pass judgement, or to stand in contrast and highlight goodness, and they incorporate good characters through whose eyes the inappropriate behavior is framed as negative. In Sweet Valley, no one, rarely even the adult characters of teachers or parents, frames the inappropriate behavior as wrong, and that was what I found so unsettling.

Appendix B lists examples from all the books examined of inappropriate behavior, usually on the part of a main character, and never an antagonist. Note that in only three of the books reviewed were there no incidences of unchecked negative

behavior. The negative behavior ranges from a one-time incident in a book to behavior upon which the entire plot is formed, such as Lila's April Fool, Caroline's Halloween Spell, Get the Teacher, Ellen is Alone, and Andy and the Alien. The examples abound, but the book that set off every moral alarm throughout the entire book was Crybaby Lois.

As a children's literature professor, I have read some discouraging novels for children that included mean-spirited behavior (Cormier's (1986) The Chocolate War or Spinelli's (1998) Wringer come to mind) and evil of the darkest despair (L'Engle's (1973) Wrinkle in Time or Lowry's (2000) Gathering Blue), but that behavior is always judged, always corrected, always includes consequences or is fiercely battled and defeated, as is the case with the highly controversial Harry Potter (1999) series. However, I have never read a meaner book than one of the books sampled from the Sweet Valley Kids series entitled Crybaby Lois. If any book should be banned, should be feared, and if any book should be heaped in a pile to burn, I nominate this one. At the beginning of the book, the second graders are at the park and Lila and Jessica taunt Lois with tricycle talk because she still has her training wheels. The main conflict of this book is how Elizabeth can find a way to help chubby Lois from being so scared and so teased. Kids take Lois's favorite sweater to tease her. Elizabeth realizes they tease because they know she will cry., Lila starts imitating Lois and Jessica follows along to mimic Lois crying. She, of course, does cry and the perpetrators show no emotion or regret throughout the entire book. Only Elizabeth feels any remorse and it is stated as "she felt terrible that her own sister could be so mean.(p.42)" Everyone with the exception of Elizabeth refuses to let Lois play with them. Lila, Jessica, and the boys pressure Lois to accept a challenge in order to win the privilege to play with them:

Lila looked surprised. Jessica whispered in her ear. "I'm going to tell Lois to climb that apple tree and pick some apples for us. But I bet she'll be too afraid to do it."

A big smile spread across Lila's face. "That's right, Lois, " she said. "You can play dolls and shopping trip with us if you do one little thing."

"What?" Lois asked. She looked nervously at Elizabeth (p.47).

"See that tree over there?" Jessica said, pointing to the apple tree.

Lois nodded.

"If you climb it and get some apples for all of us, you can—"

"No way!" Elizabeth interrupted. She shook her head and walked over to Jessica. "You know we aren't supposed to climb trees in other people's yards. And those aren't our apples, so we can't take any."

Jessica shrugged her shoulders. "It doesn't matter. Lois wouldn't do it anyway."

"That' right," Lila added "Lois is too much of a fraidy-cat to do an easy thing like that."

Todd looked surprised. "You couldn't climb a little tree like that?" he asked Lois. "It's so easy. I could probably go all the way to the top in ten seconds. (p. 48)"

"So could I," Steven boasted. "That's the simplest kind of tree to climb. Look at how the branches go out sideways."

Lois was staring at the apple tree and nervously pulling at her sweater. "I've never climbed a tree before," she said softly.

"See?" Todd laughed. "She won't do it."

Jessica smiled. "If you don't want to do it, you don't have to, Lois. But Lila and I are going home to play without you now."

"No!" Lois spoke up.

"Look out. She's going to cry." Steven teased.

"You be quiet!" Elizabeth told him angrily. You don't have to do anything you don't want to, Lois," she went on. "Don't' listen to them."

"I'll do it!" Lois whispered.(p.49)"

"All right!" Todd shouted. Jessica and Lila looked each other and smiled. This was going to be fun.

"Elizabeth grabbed Lois's hand." Lois, don't. We don't have permission to climb that tree."

"If she wants to do it, let her," Lila said. She pointed to the apple tree." Go ahead, Lois. We're waiting.(p.50)"

Chapter 8 entitled Lois to the Rescue begins with Elizabeth watching as the others tiptoed into the new neighbor's yard.

"She bit her lip.

Lois was leading the way." I guess you are brave," Lila said from behind.

Elizabeth knew Lila didn't mean it. She also knew that if Lois did not climb that tree, the others would tease her even more than before.(p.51)"

In a stroke of good luck, a kitten meows about the time Lois reaches the top. Lois rescues the new neighbors' kitten (which had never been mentioned or foreshadowed before) and is rewarded with delicious apples to share. Everyone is happy at the end of this book. Unchecked negative behavior was in abundance, but never so plainly displayed without remorse as in Crybaby Lois. I know this section is lengthy, but part of my disgust was the tenacity with which this group of children who are admired through 95 books tease and taunt poor Lois whose only crime is a dowdy, mismatched sweater, a chubby appearance, and the wish to play with this group of second graders!

Meeting Jessica and Elizabeth in Sweet Valley Kids: Concluding remarks

After I read all the feminist stuff you gave me, I thought these feminist ladies are full of it. I wasn't sure that I really believed very much of it until I started reading these books. Then, I noticed how weak and shallow the ideas and themes were compared to other kids' books...they are mindless, repetitive, and promote popularity and sometimes even meanness to others." Mary Hougland, graduate student and second reader 11/30/01

First, realizing the influence, popularity, longevity (from 1983 to present), and the sheer availability and affordability of these romance paperbacks make this population of stories a valuable collection for continued analyses. Because Sweet Valley Kids and Sweet Valley Twins series are marketed to young readers (ages 6-9 years) who are impressionable and who are able to read these books independently, the importance of examining relationships among gender roles, various archetypes and stereotypic characters is accentuated (Kelly, 1991; Mitchell, 1995). I am in hopes that this paper provided insights for all educators who share the dual challenge to provide young readers with literature that includes the diversity of robust female characters and to teach readers critical thinking skills. No doubt, the flat stereotyped characters, even the stereotypic

protagonists, offer little to young readers as they seek find positive role models for developing young women.

Second, the important albeit rare contributions that female characters made as cooperative forces or nurturing friends in these Pascal romance novels might be somehow considered positive role models for young readers. However, the lack of character development emulating growth in female characters, the examples of faux maturity, and the exhibition of negative behavior without consequences far outweigh any hint of positive influence. Young girls at this malleable age are in need of the diversity of strong characters with examples of gender roles that shatter stereotypic roles. Unfortunately, I would not recommend these books to young readers. Furthermore, upon "meeting" Jessica or Elizabeth, I would not recommend them as friends or role models to any young readers.

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APPENDIX A

Table of Results
of female protagonists in 22 Sweet Valley Kids novels
according to internal or external locus of control

a. creative reasoning or intellect	**4**
b. conflict ceases to be perceived as a problem	**1**
c. physical means or tools	**2**
d. cooperative efforts or compromise	**4**
TOTAL INTERNAL LOCUS OF CONTROL	**11**

e. unrequested intervention of same sex character/s	**3**
f. unrequested intervention of opposite sex character/s	**2**
g. unrequested intervention of both sex characters	**0**
h. some supernatural or natural occurrence	**6**
TOTAL EXTERNAL LOCUS OF CONTROL	**11**

APPENDIX B
Examples of unchecked negative behavior derived from field notes from the Sweet Valley Kids series

#3 The Twins Mystery Teacher Boys and girls trade jabs about being dumb. Then, second graders plan to sit in different seats for their substitute. " Elizabeth agreed. She usually didn't like to play jokes on people, but it would last just a little while. She guessed there would be no harm. (p. 19)" …and no harm does come to them. Later, Lois and Caroline are reticent to join in, but Charlie gave a mean look, Jerry punched Caroline in the arm and said, " I'll get you at recess if you don't. (p. 18)"

53 The Magic Puppet no evidence of "unchecked" negative behavior

63 Lila's Christmas Angel Jessica and Lila make fun of chubby Lois; Serena reminds them that was "not very nice" Shows kids on the playground making fun of Winston for his family opening presents on Christmas Eve instead of Christmas morning." Only babies can't wait until Christmas morning."

#33 Caroline's Halloween Spell Caroline is a stock character who is always a snoop and a tattletail, is being teased by everyone, including Jessica about her red hair. Elizabeth reads that red heads were thought to be witches and wants to apologize for Jessica's teasing her (but doesn't'). This book ostracizes Caroline while they spy on her and tell all their friends that Caroline is a witch and they "run for their lives" During Caroline's Halloween report, she starts a chant and Jessica and Elizabeth pour a thermos of water on her head to make her melt (reminiscent of Wizard of Oz and the Carrie scenes)

#5 Jessica's Cat Trick Jessica, Elizabeth, and Caroline lie to their parents about a cat so that they can keep it. Book frames the lying as a "trick"

#6 Lila's Secret Jessica and Elizabeth invite everyone to their sleepover except busybody Caroline.

#56 Jessica Plays Cupid Jessica likes her babysitter Molly, but her big brother plans to make her life miserable. '"I bit my lip. Molly seems pretty nice. Anyone who wore pink sneakers had to be cool. But I love to play tricks. Steven is good at thinking of them. And he had never offered to let me and Elizabeth in on it. (p. 19)" Elizabeth reprimands them and then Steven motions for her to leave. Elizabeth says okay. " Elizabeth doesn't like to play tricks, but she doesn't like to be left out either. (p. 20)"

#2 Runaway Hamster Jessica gets a replacement hamster, even though it is like telling a lie.

#48 Lila's April Fool Lila, Jessica's friend, (stereotyped rich and selfish) invites everyone to a fancy April Fool's Ball. Her dad has already refused this

request to have an expensive party with ponies, clowns, cotton candy, and a bouncy castle, but Lila forges on and says she can get her dad to do anything she wants. Jessica and Elizabeth's mom calls Lila's dad with a question and Mr. Fowler tells Mrs. Wakefield that he wants to teach Lila a little lesson: he'll continue to refuse her requests for a party, but plan one instead at the beach. Elizabeth notes: "That's a little mean, but nice at the same time. It's a good April Fool's joke. (p. 33)" All the kids are informed of the beach party, but make Lila squirm. " And tomorrow in your April Fools' Day party, isn't it?" All eyes turned to Lila. The class waited in mischievous anticipation. (p.53). Lila says April Fool, there is no party. Teacher tells her that's not a nice joke to play on your friends, to which Lila replies, "Oh well…I got the last laugh.(p,4)"

#25 Left Out Elizabeth Brother Steven, Elizabeth's friend Todd, and a new boy named Steven shun the girls and have fun on intermediate slopes.

#28 Elizabeth Meets Her Hero Elizabeth and Jessica overhear a TV celebrity, Dr. Snapturtle, scolds his dog privately and Jessica yells to him: "You are a big fake! (p.38)"

#51 Lois and the Sleepover This book contains many examples of lying to parents with no consequences. Additionally, the book frames Lois as a girl to be shunned: " Lois was chubby. She wore her hair in pigtails. Lois got teased a lot by kids. She used to cry all the time and Jessica still thought of her as a crybaby.(p.5)" Later they invite Lois because they feel sorry for her having to spend so much time with her mom.

#46 Get the Teacher Jessica suggests they all act like horrible rascals to get rid of the student teacher and the whole class turns to chaos. Elizabeth feels bad because she has never been so rude before. Jessica is the "commander in chief in charge of the attack and grins, "It was fun to be naughty on purpose. (p.25)" One of the students decides not to join in, but Jessica grabs her arm and says that the student teacher "isn't the only one we can be mean to. (p. 25)" The children are generally rotten, down to tripping poor Lois (chubby crybaby) and making her spill paint on the student teacher. They overhear that the student teacher has student loans and change their plans at the end of the book.

Hair Raiser #3 A Curse on Elizabeth no evidence of negative behavior

#52 Julie and the Karate Kid Steven and Todd taunt the girls: " Girls are always afraid they'll get punched or kicked. (p. 5)" Girls call boys names like "shrimp". Boys try to pick fight. Instructor does remind them that it's not the karate way. Julie does the wrong thing, responding physically to the taunting and teasing of the boys, but gains the respect of everyone, including the boys. Further, Jessica and Charlie recreate (cheat actually) a school project to restore their grade.

SuperSnooper #6 The Case of the Million Dollar Diamonds
no evidence of negative behavior (adults are rude and disbelieving of the children, but kids are cooperative)

#1 Surprise, Surprise "Lois looked like she wanted to join them, but Lila stared at her in a mean way until she went inside. Lois was chubby and Lila loved to tease her. (p. 9)"

#39 Ellen is Alone Ellen was pretty, but not as sweet as she looked…she loved to tease and make fun of kids she didn't like, and she could be a bit snobby. (p. 5) Debbie, Ellen's big sis tells Jessica and Elizabeth, "give me any trouble and you'll be sorry. (p. 24)" Ellen and Debbie are latchkey kids and Jessica and Elizabeth want these same freedoms. They disobey their parents, "even though their rules are too babyish.(p.41)"

#29 Andy and the Alien This book is rife with examples of all the second graders taunting and teasing Andy who is very serious, studious, and smart, and is studying aliens. Andy wears glasses and is awkward and nerdy. Charlie purposefully hits Andy, saying he was taken over by aliens. Jessica and Lila make fun of his space rock lunch. Students trip him on the bus, and follow him on the field trip to make fun of his studying aliens. Andy is somewhat restored when park ranger says not to totally discount rumors of aliens and keep an open mind, but students receive no negative consequences as a result of their meanness.

Super Snooper #5 The Case of the Hidden Treasure

The second graders are rude to an adult and call her Mrs. Crabby throughout the book. They never apologize, but do receive explanation of why she was so rude to them as they follow her to figure out what buried treasure she seeks.

11 Lois the Crybaby contains the most examples of unchecked negative behavior; see text of paper for details

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